

Side

Brown

Guy Clark may be based in Nashville but is anything but a typical Nashville songwriter as his excellent long-awaited new album *Boats to Build* (Asylum/American Explorer) reveals. Clark's is an older and less commercial tradition rooted in folk music. There are no made-to-order hook lines and calculated catchy phrases. Clark goes for something much more real, making you feel he's singing directly to you.

Excellently produced by Clark and Miles Wilkinson with subtle, tasteful accompaniment by such Nashville stalwarts as Jerry Douglas and Sam Bush plus guest appearances by Rodney Crowell, Emmylou Harris and Marty Stuart (among others), the songs run from the whimsical cowboy philosophy of "Ramblin' Jack and Mahan" to the rocking blues of "Must Be My Baby" to the carefree swing of "Baton Rouge."

Clark isn't afraid to get a bit silly and it's obvious that he's enjoying himself when he does, often cracking up at his own lines. One of his greatest gifts, apparent on "Picasso's Mandolin" and "How'd You Get This Number" is his ability to combine that silliness with a feeling that more serious emotions are lurking just beneath the surface.

Clark is at his best however, when he goes right for the heart on the stunningly beautiful title track and the somewhat lighter "I Don't Love You Much Do I," sung as a duet with Emmylou Harris. These two songs are instant "classics". Also impressive is "Madonna w/Child ca. 1969," which shows Clark's mastery of eloquent simplicity and his way of telling a story without excess.

Notoriously slow at both writing and recording, *Boats to Build* is only Clark's seventh album in 18 years of recording. It leaves you hungry for more, but also was made to last.

Mark Collie fits somewhere in between the total earthiness of Clark and Nashville's slicker instincts. His third eponymously titled album (MCA) is an apparent attempt to set him apart from the dozens of other country singers and songwriters who've surfaced in the last few years.

Production wise, Collie is caught between modern Nashville rock and the more roots-oriented sound some of his songs cry out for. The guitars are slick with Southern rock-oriented slide leads when they should be funky with twangy country leads.

Collie's heart seems to be in the songs that lean towards rockabilly like "Shame Shame Shame Shame," "Keep It Up" and "Hillbilly Boy With the Rock 'N' Roll Blues." He also fares quite well with the swingy "Heart of the Matter." The hit-oriented pop country songs such as "Born to Love You" pale in comparison.

Collie pulls off the pop-oriented stuff, but it's nothing special. If he continues to explore his funkier instincts, he'll be worth watching.

The **Burns Brothers** also known as **Run C&W** have just released *Into the Twangy-First Century* (MCA). The title might lead one to believe the songs are country parodies of rap songs, but are really bluegrass versions of R and B.

In real life, The Burns Brothers are Russell Smith, former lead singer of the Amazing Rhythm Aces and quite a good songwriter; former Eagle, Bernie Leadon; session keyboard man, Vince Melamed and songwriter/bass player Jim Photoglo who are credited as producers. Following the lead of the Traveling Wilburys, they take phony names: Crashen, G.W. "Wash", Side, Rug with fiddler Vassar Clements sitting in as "Honorary".

If you play music and you're in the right (usually close to insane) state of mind, taking a song and playing it bluegrass style can be a lot of fun and sometimes you actually come up with something. (My personal favorite is "Sympathy For the Devil.")

Smith sings most of the leads and is often quite funny. Leadon is also quite adept at transferring the humor to banjo, and his playing is excellent on Stevie Wonder's "Superstition" and "Hold On I'm Comin'."

Best (funniest) tracks are "Stop In the Name of Love" and "Sweet Soul Music," where the names of country artists are substituted for the original R and B musicians, and Allen Toussaint's "Working in the Coal Mine" and James Brown's "I Got You" actually

work quite well as bluegrass. However they get too hokey on "Please Please Please" which quickly becomes boring.

Ten to one, they probably did this whole album so they could get in the parody of "Achy Breaky Heart" "Itchy Twitchy Spot."

To spread a joke over an entire compact disc is a long shot and *Run C & W* only works some of the time.

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Way back in the mid 1960s, when folk rock was just starting to happen, there was talk of a hot West Coast band (that Dylan was supposed to really like) called the Rising Sons with a singer named Taj Mahal and a guitarist named Ry Cooder. I remember seeing there one single, Rev. Gary Davis' "Candy Man" at a radio station I used to hang out at, but other than that the band never hit the East Coast and the album never materialized, though Taj Mahal's first solo album with Cooder playing guitar and mandolin appeared

a few years later. So I was happily surprised a couple of months ago to walk into a store and see *Rising Sons featuring Taj Mahal and Ry Cooder* (Columbia Legacy). The album represents the first recordings of Mahal and

Cooder and as such will be of interest to fans of both.

The Rising Sons who also included drummer and Byrd-for-awhile Kevin Kelley, guitarist/singer, Jesse Lee Kincaid and bassist Gary Marker couldn't decide whether to be a rock or blues band and tried to settle for both. The excellent, often humorous liner notes detail the dilemma and the album bears this out with the blues songs standing out and most of the rock tracks kind of funny.

Some of the blues tracks are kind of funny too. Ry Cooder probably doesn't want to remember his vocal on Skip James' "Devil's Got My Woman."

Still, there's lots of good stuff including two different versions of "Statesboro Blues," that lost single of "Candy Man," Sleepy John Estes' "Divin' Duck Blues" and a beautiful song called "Train."

Also worthwhile is the early version of "Take A Giant Step," still a staple of Mahal's shows, Pamela Polland's "Tulsa County," later done by the Byrds, and Dylan's "Walkin' Down the Line" with different lyrics than usual and Mahal playing a very Dylanesque harp solo.

Both Mahal and Cooder (who was 17 at the time and looks even younger in the photos) show they had it back then.

The album came out with Mahal's cooperation and he even added new vocals to three instrumental tracks, "Dust My Broom," "Last Fair Deal Gone Down" and "Baby What You Want Me To Do" replacing vocal tracks apparently lost. Making the album more fun is that only if you know that last bit of information can you tell.